

Good morning, Chairman Sesso and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Representative Dee Brown from House District 3, which is the grizzly bear and huckleberry capital of Montana on the west side of Glacier National Park.

I am introducing HB91 which is a bill to give state workers a \$1 an hour raise in their pay. This was the same bill I presented in 2005 to give our lowest paid workers in state government the highest percentage of wage increases since \$1 an hour for a \$9 an hour employee means over 10% in increased salary.

These are the very employees that the union is always citing as needing salary increases. Yet when they negotiate a contract in most years they negotiate the same percentage to be given all government workers. That means that workers with \$90,000 annual salaries gobble up the lion's share of wages.

HB91 is my attempt to recognize the value of our low wage workers and let them have a bigger piece of the pie. I appreciate Governor Schweitzer's recognition of this unbalanced system and giving everyone under \$45,000 a year a lump sum of \$450 this biennium. I hope this idea continues with the executive branch and honors the state's commitment to those on the low end of earnings in state government. They work hard and deserve to be rewarded. With increased wages we may be able to retain them and eliminate the turnover and retraining occurring in many of these jobs.

Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I urge a 'do pass' on HB91 and reserve the right to close.